

(My apologies in advance for writing an op-ed for a simple discussion. If you should happen to read all the way through, you'll correctly conclude this is a topic that pushes my buttons.)

To me fan culture is a topic of great interest and also a major source of frustration, but probably not for the reasons you might assume.

As most Patriots fans discovered throughout the Deflategate debacle, Roger Goodell is not the only person who could be indicted for acting on predetermined conclusions. Fans of numerous teams were all too happy to jump on the "Cheatriots" band wagon, proudly clinging to Chris Mortensen's erroneous reports that initially hurled the New England Patriots into the biggest sports controversy of the decade. It seems that some folks are convinced that "Tom Brady did it," and no amount of scientific evidence is persuasive enough to alter that perception. I've personally stepped through the evidence with a number of folks, and when logical arguments were depleted, and I asked again, "On what do you base your conclusion?" I've heard far too many times, "Well I just know."

I've also tried to explain to a number of people that as soon as Deflategate left Roger Goodell's arbitration, the matter was no longer about deflated footballs or guilt versus innocence of the quarterback, but rather a power struggle regarding an outdated provision in the CBA known as "Article 46." You can probably imagine the blank stares on that one. While I'll have to admit a few people were interested in hearing what I had to say, the vast majority seemed highly irritated that I would dare to clutter their version of reality with the "irrelevant" topics of science and law.

But.....

The question I must ask is, "Are we as Patriots fans any better at discerning objective fact than our counterparts who like the Broncos, Jets, or any of the other franchise teams of the NFL?" I know that I am not alone in the experiences I've described above, and based on this premise, one would seem to logically conclude that Patriots fans would be the most objective fan base in the league. Unfortunately, I've found the opposite to be true in many instances.

The Al Jazeera PED controversy gave us a chance to prove our objectivity. Sadly I think few of us met the bar. More often than not, I heard comments saying that "golden boy" Peyton Manning would be cleared, and he was. But was this based on evidence or the resultant thinking of a heated rivalry with those blasted "Donkeys?" I've considered inviting friends who happen to be fair-minded Broncos fans to our "Defenders of the Wall" Facebook group but have opted not to do so for the simple reasons that (A.) I doubt they like being referred to as "Donkeys" any more than Patriots fans like the "Cheatriots" reference and (B.) I'm a little bit embarrassed by the bias I see among many of my fellow

Patriots fans. Yes, the league is political and the unprecedented punishments heaped on the Patriots were the result of some administrative maneuvering and leveraging, but must we as fans succumb to the same behavior we claim to despise?

Sure, Roger Goodell again asserted his power and for all practical purposes threatened (within his court upheld authority) to effectively end the careers of these players until they submitted to his ~~investigation~~ interrogation, but outside confirmation of the NFL/NFLPA power play what did we conclude?

Removing Manning from the equation and considering the known evidence against Peppers, Matthews, Harrison, and Neal, did we do much better in evaluating the issue? Most people I've observed believed that once the players agreed to talk to the NFL, they would be exonerated because "Goodell already had the big prize" in Tom Brady coupled with the argument that the "golden boy's legacy" had to be spared.. Never in the course of the controversy did I hear anyone outside of the journalistic or legal communities debate whether or not Charles Sly was a credible witness, whether or not Peyton Manning's intimidation tactics may have influenced Sly, whether Al Jazeera America was a credible news source, or whether given the time lapse between the allegations and investigation could any reasonable conclusion be discerned? So I ask again, when we made our predictions regarding the fate of the named players, on what did we base our opinions?

I think the bulk of all fan bases are just as guilty as the leagues we criticize in evaluating guilt, innocence, and appropriate discipline. The current reaction to litigation against basketball superstar Derrick Rose illustrates my point perfectly. For those who may not be familiar with the ongoing civil suit against Rose which is scheduled for trial on October 4, Rose and two companions are accused of the gang-rape of a victim who has filed anonymously as Jane Doe. Numerous motions and records of evidence as well as deposition testimony have been made public. The case boils down to a crucial element – that of consent – and in sworn testimony, Rose admits that he doesn't understand the meaning of the word "consent." Also disturbing in this case is that when Rose was questioned as to his motive in going to Doe's place of residence with his companions, he responded. "We men." Text messages show evidence of Doe refusing group sex on numerous occasions, however, it is undisputed that "we men" went to her apartment for that purpose and did in fact engage in sex with Doe. If you're not familiar with the case here's a good, balanced [primer](#) by sports law attorney Dan Werly and a [follow up](#) by our esteemed professor, Michael McCann to bring you up to speed. The judge and jury in this suit will have much to sort out, but based on the preponderance of available evidence and testimony; there is room to believe that Rose could in fact be guilty of the alleged assault.

But dang! He sure is a good basketball player, and did a lot for the Chicago Bulls and will probably do the same for his new team, the Knicks. Does this negate

the possibility that he committed a brutal rape? Many of his fans seem to think so. If you read Mr. Werly's primer, linked above, you will see that he carefully and tactfully presented the arguments of both the plaintiff and defendant in this case, yet in spite of this he's received scores of vitriolic responses to his article by angered Rose fans. Here's one of the least inflammatory:

["He should settle because it's not right to cheat a Prostitute."](#)

Early on in the case, Werly retweeted a few of the responses he'd received, but when I asked him if he could send me some to illustrate my point, I learned that he'd had to mute a number of Twitter users because of the onslaught of negative and vicious remarks that were flooding in, and therefore the tweets were irretrievable. Here's one more that he was able to find....if all else fails, attack the writer:

[I read your blog, and it is shitty writing. Your grammar and syntax is atrocious.](#)

If you're still with me you're probably fuming and thinking how terrible this mindset is. I'm in agreement. Now think about this: what if the player named had been Rob Gronkowski? How would we as Patriots fans have reacted? I'm thankful it's not Gronk and we don't have to make this wrenching evaluation but if we honestly consider our reactions, would we have made a knee-jerk assumption that he couldn't have possibly done something so vile, or would we have embarked on an honest search for the truth? Each person must examine and answer that question for him or herself. I hope by contemplating these unpleasanties that we might come away with an enhanced sense of objectivity and a heightened ability to separate ourselves from the situation and perform as Stephanie Stradley terms it, "dispassionate analysis."

I've heard many claim that sports is escapism and shouldn't be mingled with society's ills. I disagree. Modern sports have been a mirror of society throughout their existence. Baseball was integrated before America was. Muhammad Ali caused people to examine the merits of the Vietnam War. Current controversies give cause to weigh in on violence against women, racial inequality, and the meaning of patriotism. Even Deflategate mirrors the uneven stance of the court system in weighing labor and non-labor arbitrations, and begs an answer to the question, "where does fairness fit into the picture?"

If you've stayed with me this far and haven't tossed your computer, tablet or phone across the room, thank you for reading and considering this point of view. Let's love, applaud, and cheer our teams, but let's not allow our fandom to place entertainment above rationality. If we as fans would somehow find a way to unite and do this collectively regardless of team affiliation, we just might be the most powerful force the NFL or any other sports league has ever had to reckon with and one of the most effective catalysts for change imaginable.

[You Can't Separate Derrick Rose the Knick From Derrick Rose the Defendant](#)

[Why don't NFL fans hate Pete Carroll as much as Bill Belichick?](#)